

Message Text

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51

ACTION NEA-13

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 DRC-01 /142 W

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R 311000Z JAN 74 ZEL

FM USINT DAMASCUS

TOPRUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0029

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USINT CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USUN NEW YORK 001

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0029

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 5.)

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

1. RUMORS IN DAMASCUS CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE THAT CABINET
RESHUFFLE IS IMMINENT. UNLIKE PREVIOUS REPORTS OF PARTIAL
RESHUFFLE, IT NOW BEINRSaid THAT CABINET WILL BE CHANGED IN
ITS ENTIRETY. NO NAMES ARE BING CITED, ALTHOUGH TOURISM
MINISTER ABDULLAH AL-KHANI CONTINUE TO BE MENTIONED AS FOREIGN
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MINISTER. ASAD IS REPORTED TO BE HAVING DAILY MEETINGS WITH

VARIOUS GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS AS PART OF HIS EFFORT TO BRING ABOUT CABINET CHANGE WHICH WILL REFLECT BASIC SYRIAN POLICY SHIFT TOWARDS INTER ALIA SYRIAN ATTENDANCE AT GENEVA. ASAD IS ALSO SAID TO BE CONTINUING TO MOVE AGAINST DISSIDENT ELEMENTS WITHIN ARMY AND THERE ARE REPORTS OF ARRESTS OF ARMY OFFICERS AND MEN. (DURING MY CALL ON MILITARY POLICE JAN. 30 TO PICK UP SOME JONATHAN BATES PERSONAL BELONGINGS, I NOTICED A LOT OF BUSTLING AROUND AND OFFICER IN CHARGE SAID HE HAD NOT GOTTEB MUCH SLEEP LAST COUPLE OF DAYS.)

2. WITH REGARD TO THESE REPORTS, LOCAL PRESS HAS BEEN CARRYING STORIES OF DAILY MEETINGS BETWEEN ASAD AND CENTRAL COMMAND OF PROGRESSIVE FRONT, THE UMBRELLA POLITICAL ASSOCIATION IN SYRIA.

3. MEANWHILE, IT IS INTERESTING THAT LOCAL PRESS OVER LAST WEEK OR SO HAS GIVEN NO PUBLICITY TO SADAT STATEMENTS THAT EGYPT STANDS FULLY BEHIND SYRIA AND WILL NOT MAKE SEPARATE DEAL AT SYRIAN EXPENSE. THIS OMISSION IS BEING LOCALLY INTERPRETED TO MEAN THAT ASAD IFUSTILL NOT CONVINCED OF SADAT'S GOOD IMTENTIONS PRATICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE UNILATERAL WAY IN WHICH SADAT HAS MOVED SINCE END OF OCTOBER WAR WITH SIGNING OF CEASEFIRE AND ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN DISENGAGEMENT. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, IT IS SAID THAT ASAD WANTS TO BELIEVE SADAT AND IS NOT ALLOWING HIMSELF TO BE INFLUENCED BY EXTREMISTS WITHIN REGIME.

4. FINALLY, JAN. 30, RADIO CARRIED IN STRAIGHT NEWS FASHION FOR FIRST TIME IN RECENT MEMORY STORY OF GOLDA MEIR DESIGNATION TO FORM NEW ISRAELI CABINET. IN THIS REGARD, A GOOD SOURCE ALSO HAS INFORMED ME THAT INSTRUCTIONS WERE RECENTLY SENT BY PRIME MINISTER TO INFORMATION MINISTRY ORDERING SYRIAN NEWS MEDIA TO DROP USE OFC HRWSEIWFOTE ISRAELI AGRESSION UNQUOTE.

5. COMMENT: WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT WHAT WILL FINALLY HAPPEN TO CABINET, MY CALL ON KHADDAM JAN. 30 DID NOT REVEAL A MAN WHO APPEARED TO BE ON HIS WAY OUT. IN ANY CASE, THESE REPORTS WOULD TEND CORROBORATE INDICATIONS WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING OVER LAST COUPLE WEEKS OF ASAD'S EFFORTS TO OBTAIN CONSENSUS BEFORE FOLLOWING THROUGH ON HIS DECISION TO PROCEED TO GENEVA. THIS WAS SAME TACTIC HE USED IN NOVEMBER 1970 TO LEGITIMATIZE HIS CONTROL OVER BA'TH PARTY AND SYRIAN REGIME
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FOLLOWING HIS TAKEOVER FROM DISCREDITED BA'TH ELEMENTS WHICH HAD LAUNCHED SYRIAN ADVENTURE INTO JORDAN. IN COUNTRY LIKE SYRIA, THIS KIND OF FENCE-BUILDING TAKES TIME. FOLLOWING HIS MEETINGS IN DAMASCUS, FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER JOBERT DESCRIBED ASAD TO NATO AMBASSADORS AS "A MAN WHO KNOWS WHAT HE WANTS AND KNOWS WHERE HE IS GOING". NEXT FEW WEEKS WILL TELL.
SCOTES

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